

THE COST of PANIC DEFENCE

Government Estimates That Expenditure Over Five Years Will Exceed £1,500 Million

SIMULTANEOUSLY with the Service Estimates last week the Government issued a Statement on Defence (Cmd. 5682), dealing with all three fighting Services.

The concluding paragraph takes the form of a warning that the cost of national defence may prove even greater than the sum mentioned in the White Paper of February, 1937 (Cmd. 5374), and the explanation of that warning is couched in the following terms:—

"The continuous development of modern armaments has given rise in the past twelve months to a number of new needs; and the growing power and complexity of new weapons tends to increase their cost. The flexibility of the whole programme has made it possible to meet by reductions in other directions some part of the increased cost arising from these tendencies, but under present international conditions they must continue to operate and to enlarge the total of expenditure. It must therefore be expected that even on the assumption that 1939, as now seems probable, will be the peak year of defence expenditure, the total expenditure on defence over the five financial years 1937-41 will exceed the sum of £1,500 millions mentioned in the White Paper of February, 1937."

Elsewhere in the Statement it is pointed out that the Estimates for the current financial year provide for a total expenditure by the three Defence Departments (including Royal Ordnance Factories) of £278½ millions, of which £80 millions was to be met by issues from the Consolidated Fund under the Defence Loans Act, 1937. In addition, about 5½ millions was provided for air raid precautions schemes. For the year 1938 provision is made in the Estimates of the three Defence Departments for expenditure amounting to £434½ millions, of which it is proposed to meet £90 millions by issues from the Consolidated Fund under the Defence Loans Act. In addition, nearly £8½ millions is provided for air raid precautions services. The defence programmes now in hand are regarded as likely to involve defence expenditures in 1939 in excess of the provision made in the Estimates for 1938.

To some extent the Statement on Defence overlaps the Memorandum published with the Air Estimates, but in some cases the same information is given in a slightly different form or contains certain facts not given in the Memorandum.

It is stated that between April and December, 1937, the two anti-aircraft divisions increased their strength by 345 officers and over 9,000 other ranks.

Of the balloon barrage it is said that most of the material has already been delivered and sufficient regular personnel have been fully trained to enable them to supervise and train in their turn the auxiliary personnel who will be primarily responsible for manning the barrage. Recruiting of the auxiliary personnel is expected to start in May.

The divided responsibility for anti-aircraft defence is explained in the Statement as follows: "As regards the system of organisation, the Air Ministry is responsible for the air defence scheme as a whole and the anti-aircraft units of the

Territorial Army, which provide the gun and searchlight defences, come directly under the Air Officer Commander-in-Chief, Fighter commands, for operations in war and combined training in peace. Plans are prepared in a Joint Committee, the membership of which includes the Anti-Aircraft Divisional Commanders and representatives of the operations branches of the War Office and Air Ministry, the Air Officer Commander-in-Chief, Fighter Command, being Chairman. The latter has on his staff two General Staff officers from the Army. The Anti-Aircraft Divisional Commanders have their Headquarters with the Commanders of the Fighter Groups in peace. In all operational matters there is direct communication between Headquarters, Fighter Command and the Anti-Aircraft Divisions."

Of purely air force matters dealt with in the Statement the following are of interest: "Notwithstanding the increase of the numbers under training, experience shows that the new pilots are entering the service squadrons from the flying training schools with a higher standard of flying efficiency than formerly. Since April, 1935, approximately 4,500 candidates have been accepted for training as pilots, and 40,000 airmen (including 6,300 apprentices) mostly for training in skilled trades, as compared with a typical pre-expansion entry of approximately 300 pilots and 1,600 airmen a year.

The Volunteer Reserve

"The Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, which was recently established to create a reserve of pilots and other personnel, is working very satisfactorily and will be further extended. The estimated pilot entry for the year April, 1937-March, 1938, was 800, but this programme has already been exceeded, and over 1,000 entrants for the pilot reserve have been accepted since April, 1937. The number of centres so far opened is 21, and 12 more will be opened in 1938."

The Statement is curiously reticent on the subject of the handing over to the Admiralty of the control of the Fleet Air Arm, the only paragraph elucidating this important change reading as follows:

"Detailed plans are being worked out by the Admiralty and Air Ministry to give effect to the decision taken in July, 1937, for the transfer to the Admiralty of the administrative control of the Fleet Air Arm. The Air Ministry will be responsible for the training of pilots up to the point when their specialised training begins, after which the Admiralty will assume full responsibility."

The Statement adds no fresh information concerning new ships to be laid down in 1938, but confirms that these include one carrier and one Fleet Air Arm supply and repair ship.

On the subject of production the statement discloses the following interesting information:

"One of the two airframe shadow factories is expected to begin production a few weeks hence and the other later in the year. Other shadow factories for airscrews and carburettors have also started production, and a shadow factory for bombs is on the point of doing so; these factories are additions to the programme as at first conceived, and are examples of the enlargements which the working-out of the programme entails."



A FASTER WHITLEY : An example of the Armstrong Whitworth Whitley heavy bomber, now in service with Siddeley Tiger engines, has been fitted with Rolls-Royce Merlins of higher power. The new machine, as shown, has temporary fairings over nose and stern gun positions.

"Flight" photograph